



Security Council

Distr.
GENERAL

S/1994/1420
14 December 1994

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

PROGRESS REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE SITUATION CONCERNING WESTERN SAHARA

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In the report I submitted to the Security Council on 5 November 1994 (S/1994/1257) on progress made by the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) in the process of identification and registration of potential voters, I stated that I would report further to the Council after the consultations I intended to hold during my visit to the Mission area in November.

2. In a statement by the President of the Security Council (S/PRST/1994/67) following consideration of my report, the Council, inter alia, welcomed my decision to visit the region and expressed the hope that, on that occasion, I would be able to report significant progress towards the implementation of the settlement plan and the holding of the referendum.

II. CONSULTATIONS IN THE MISSION AREA

3. I visited the Mission area from 25 to 29 November 1994. I was accompanied throughout the visit by Mr. Erik Jensen, my Deputy Special Representative for Western Sahara. At Algiers, I was received by the State President, Mr. Liamine Zeroual. I also held meetings with Mr. Abdelkader Bensalah, President of the National Transition Council; Mr. Mokdad Sifi, Head of Government; Mr. Mohamed Salah Dembri, Minister for Foreign Affairs; the Permanent Representative of Algeria to the United Nations, Mr. Ramtane Lamamra; and other senior officials of the Algerian Government.

4. At all my meetings in Algiers, I stressed the urgency of reaching an early settlement and sought Algeria's continued cooperation. At every level, the Algerian authorities reassured me of their firm support for the activities of the United Nations in Western Sahara and reaffirmed their preparedness to provide all necessary assistance in my efforts. They stressed, in particular, the need for the parties to adhere strictly to the provisions of the settlement plan, which they considered essential for the credibility of the referendum.

5. At Smara refugee camp near Tindouf, which I visited on 27 November, I met with Mr. Mohamed Abdelaziz, Secretary-General of the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguia El-Hamra y de Río de Oro (Frente POLISARIO), Mr. Bachir Mustapha Sayed, Deputy Secretary-General of the Frente POLISARIO and its Coordinator with MINURSO, Mr. Bukhari Ahmed, the representative of the Frente POLISARIO in New York, and other senior POLISARIO officials. Issues discussed included the process leading to the referendum; the Security Council's position on this issue; increasing the number of identification centres and personnel; various other aspects of MINURSO's work; and the cooperation of both parties with my Deputy Special Representative. The POLISARIO leaders expressed concern about certain developments since the beginning of the identification and registration process that they viewed as impediments to the smooth implementation of the settlement plan and the conduct of a free, fair and impartial referendum.

6. They emphasized that, despite those impediments and the reservation they had about some of the criteria for eligibility to participate in the referendum, they had steadfastly maintained their cooperation with MINURSO and the Deputy Special Representative. They urged the United Nations to address the issues of concern in order to facilitate the implementation of the plan. They raised also the question of direct talks with the other party and, in this connection, reiterated their proposal for a conference in which, in addition to the parties, certain members of the Security Council and some other interested countries would participate. Such a conference would, in their view, provide a forum and an opportunity for the parties to engage in direct dialogue on outstanding matters, including the post-referendum period. Furthermore, the Frente POLISARIO leaders believed that that would be in line with the provisions of General Assembly resolutions that have consistently called for direct talks between the two parties in order to create an atmosphere conducive to the speedy and effective implementation of the settlement plan. They indicated, however, that, while they continued to believe that direct dialogue would be useful, they would not make it a prerequisite for the continuation of the peace process in conformity with the plan.

7. Addressing the Frente POLISARIO'S main concern - the large number of application forms submitted at the last minute - I pointed out that the Identification Commission was an independent body whose members, I was confident, would carry out their mandate with impartiality, fairness and integrity. I urged the Frente POLISARIO leaders to continue to cooperate with my Deputy Special Representative and MINURSO so as to facilitate rapid progress in the implementation of the plan. I made it clear, however, that, ultimately, the continued involvement of the United Nations would depend on the demonstrated political will of the parties.

8. While insisting that all necessary measures should be taken to guarantee the credibility of the referendum, Mr. Abdelaziz reiterated his full commitment to the settlement plan and pledged his continuing cooperation with MINURSO and my Deputy Special Representative. We both agreed that the beginning of identification and registration was a major step towards the full implementation of the plan and that our efforts in the months ahead should focus on the measures necessary to accelerate very significantly the pace of this process.

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9. At Rabat, where I arrived after a visit to the headquarters of MINURSO at Laayoune, I was received by His Majesty King Hassan II of Morocco. I also held meetings with the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Abdelatif Filali; the Minister of the Interior and Information, Mr. Driss Basri; the Permanent Representative of Morocco to the United Nations, Mr. Ahmed Snoussi, and other senior officials of the Government of Morocco. At these meetings, a wide range of issues relating to the implementation of the settlement plan were discussed. These included the referendum; progress achieved so far in identification and registration and measures required to accelerate the pace of the process; the cooperation of both parties with MINURSO and my Deputy Special Representative; and the position and expectations of the Security Council regarding the process leading to the holding of the referendum.

10. I was reassured that Morocco remained fully committed to the settlement plan and would continue to provide all assistance required for my efforts to implement the plan. The Moroccan authorities further pledged continued support for the activities of MINURSO and the efforts of my Deputy Special Representative. They also considered that the beginning of the identification and registration process was a very important step despite the delays the process had experienced, and promised to cooperate actively with my Deputy Special Representative with a view to achieving its successful completion within a reasonable time-frame.

11. In my report to the Security Council of 5 November, I informed the Council of my intention to send a technical team to MINURSO to reassess the logistic and other requirements for the possible full deployment of the Mission at full strength. The team visited MINURSO from 10 to 14 November and worked closely with the Mission's staff in updating the military, logistic, civilian personnel and other requirements for the possible full deployment of the Mission. The technical team identified one of the major bottlenecks as being the lack of suitable accommodation throughout the Mission area for MINURSO personnel.

12. Given the work still to be completed in the identification of potential voters, the technical team found that it was as yet premature to make final arrangements with regard to the logistic and other resources required for the deployment of MINURSO at full strength. The team agreed that MINURSO should focus on finding means to speed up the process of identifying and registering potential voters and, in this connection, strongly supported the idea of expanding the Identification Commission.

III. OBSERVATIONS

13. The above account of my consultations with the parties indicates that, despite the difficulties encountered and the delays experienced over the past few months, the political will exists to move the process forward. Both parties recognize the major step that the beginning of the identification and registration process has marked. The identification and registration process is all the more important because, unless it is carried out in a thorough and consistent manner and to the reasonable satisfaction of the two parties in terms of its fairness and impartiality, any dispute that resulted would be likely to affect the implementation of the other aspects of the plan and could prejudice

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the credibility of the referendum. It is therefore essential that all necessary measures be taken not only to accelerate the pace of the process but also to ensure that it is carried out in the appropriate manner.

14. My visit to the identification and registration centre near MINURSO headquarters in Laayoune has enabled me to see how complex and time-consuming the identification and registration process has to be in order to overcome objections, resolve doubts and deliver a convincing and credible outcome.

15. Further complicating matters in a territory of such vast size are the logistical problems of ensuring the presence at all identification and registration centres of observers of both parties and of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), as well as the tribal leaders who have a key role in identification and registration. The fact that in the refugee camps as well as in the territory itself members of the same tribal group are widely dispersed in several different places poses a further difficulty.

16. It is hoped that, with the promised cooperation of the parties and using MINURSO's own resources, all the data relating to the application forms will be available in computerized form by the end of this year. That and the experience gained to date by the identification and registration teams augurs well for the next stage of the process.

17. However, given the large number of applications now received, the only way to complete identification and registration in a reasonable time would be through a major reinforcement of personnel and other resources. My Deputy Special Representative has indicated that the four identification and registration teams working at Laayoune and Tindouf (two at each centre) have achieved a weekly output of 1,000 potential voters interviewed and identified and that the rate of output is steadily increasing. After his return to Laayoune, my Deputy Special Representative was able to reach final agreement with the Moroccan authorities on the opening of a new centre in Boujdour. Accordingly, identification began in Boujdour on 2 December and, on 5 December, a further centre near Tindouf became operational. It is estimated, however, that the completion of the work within a reasonable time-frame will require an estimated 25 teams working simultaneously at an increased number of identification and registration centres. As indicated in my previous report (S/1994/1257), consultations are already being held with the parties regarding the location, equipping and opening of additional centres.

18. MINURSO has developed a plan for the establishment of six additional centres (each to include two identification and registration teams) and five mobile identification and registration teams. Preliminary cost estimates for the further expansion of the Identification Commission are contained in a separate addendum to the present report.

19. Each identification centre consists of six Professionals, namely, three identification commission members (one of whom is the team leader), two Arabic-speaking registration officers and one systems analyst. The mobile identification teams consist of one identification commission member, one Arabic-speaking registration officer and one systems analyst. Thus, a total number of 51 additional Professional staff will be required to expand the

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identification commission as recommended. The increase in the number of identification centres will require a commensurate increase in the number of administrative support staff both at the centres and at MINURSO headquarters. These Professionals will be assisted by a commensurate increase in the number of international and local General Service staff. Approximately 13 civilian police are required to provide security and assist with the identification activities at each centre, and 4 civilian police are required for each mobile team. As the present strength of the civilian police component is 55, an additional 105 civilian police will be required, including 10 officers at the civilian police headquarters.

20. The increase in the number of identification centres will also necessitate an increase in the number of observers from OAU, and I urge that organization to continue to make every effort to deploy the observers necessary to facilitate the identification process.

21. It is my hope that, by 31 March 1995, progress achieved in the identification and registration process will reach a level that will enable me to recommend 1 June 1995 as the date (D-day) for the start of the transitional period. As of 1 June 1995, in accordance with the settlement plan, the combatants of the two sides would be confined to designated locations and, as soon as possible after this date, prisoners-of-war would be exchanged, amnesties would be proclaimed for political prisoners and detainees and for returnees and all political prisoners or detainees would be released. Not later than mid-August 1995 (D + 11 weeks), the reduction of Moroccan forces present in the Territory would be completed and all laws or measures that could obstruct the conduct of a free and fair referendum would be suspended.

22. In mid-August, on the assumption that the Security Council had approved the expansion of MINURSO as proposed in paragraphs 17 to 19 above, the identification and registration of voters should be completed and the final list of voters published. The repatriation programme should be completed by the end of September (D + 17). The latter date would coincide with the start of the referendum campaign in time to permit the referendum to take place in October 1995 (D + 20). The draft code of conduct for the referendum campaign has already been completed and forwarded to the parties for their comments.
